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Peer-review status of attached file:

Unknown

Citation for published item:

Beaujouan, Juline (2018) 'Syrian conflict, Syrian refugees. – Part II. The case of Lebanon.', Discussion Paper. Durham University, HH Sheikh Nasser Al-Sabah Programme, Durham.

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HH Sheikh Nasser
al-Mohammad al-Sabah
Publication Series

Syrian Conflict, Syrian Refugees – Part II

The Case of Lebanon

Juline Beaujouan

Number 24: August 2018



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The History of Refugees in Lebanon before the Syrian Conflict

While it was going through major internal shift of governments – from being part of the Ottoman Empire to an independent Republic through the French dominance – Lebanon started welcoming major populations of refugees as early as 1915.

Armenian Refugees After the 1915 Genocide and 1939 Turkish Dominance

The Armenian genocide of 1915 and the Kemalist uprising against the French rule imposed by the Sykes-Picot agreement in 1920 led to a first wave of Armenian refugees in Lebanon. At that time, modern Lebanon was part of Ottoman Syria. The influx stopped on February 9, 1921 with the recapture of Gaziantep by the French forces. The conflict was settled by the Ankara Agreement on October 20, 1921. France made several territorial concessions to Turkey, including Sicilia where many Armenian were living. From 1922 to 1930, reinforced Turkish intimidation over its

minorities led more Armenian to flee. While most of refugees found shelter in Cyprus, Egypt, and Syria, the orphanages were transferred to Lebanon.¹ In August 1922, some 400 Armenian orphans from Sicilia reached Beirut. Overall, 800 Armenian families are believed to have fled to Syria and Lebanon while no exact number exists.²

Armenian refugees were well integrated in Lebanon and Syria. On August 30, 1924, the French High Commissioner in Syria and Lebanon issued two decrees (Nos. 2825 and 2825bis) by which Lebanese and Syrian nationalities shall be conferred *en bloc* to all ex-Ottoman subjects residing in the territories of Lebanon and Syria.³ The decree n°2825 legally created the Lebanese nationality, which used to be attached to Syria or the Ottoman Empire. Armenian refugees who arrived in Lebanon before January 1925 were naturalised. As for those who arrived later on, they were given the same benefit on the condition of five year's continuous residence in Lebanon and Syria.⁴

Although many Armenian refugees left Lebanon during the Civil War, around 170,000 well-integrated Armenians still reside in Lebanon.

Palestinian Refugees After the 1948 and 1967 Wars

When the Arab-Israeli conflict broke out in 1948, 100,000 Palestinians fled to Lebanon and were not allowed to return.⁵ More Palestinians arrived later into the 1960s and 1970s due to sporadic conflicts following the Six-Day War in 1967.

Lebanon adopted a mixed policy towards Palestinian refugees. On the one hand, the country gave citizenship to about 50,000 Christians during the 1950s and 1960s. In the mid-1990s, about 60,000 Shia Muslim refugees were also granted citizenship. This generated protest from the Maronite authority, leading to the Lebanese citizenship being given to all Palestinian Christian refugees.⁶ On the other hand, apart from the Christians, Palestinians were far less lucky.

Palestinian refugees in Lebanon were described as “the most unfortunate and destitute grouping of Palestinian refugees in any Arab host country”.⁷ Lebanon’s official stance was always to defend the Palestinians’ right of return, in line with UN resolution 194, and to leave the responsibility of Palestinians refugees to the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine

Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). Twelve official Palestinian refugee camps were built, in which half of Palestinian refugees live.

The government’s (non)management of Palestinian refugees has exacerbated the marginalisation of this group from the rest of the population. The policy of “containment” has meant that Palestinian refugees have limited social and civil rights,⁸ no access to public social services and very limited access to public health or educational facilities.⁹ Palestinians were granted the full right to work as any other foreigner in 2010 only. Moreover, Palestinian refugees were not allowed to own, sell, and bequeath property.¹⁰

The UN describes the situation of Palestinian refugees as a “protracted refugee situation”, defined by the UNHCR as “one in which refugees find themselves in a long-lasting and intractable state of limbo. Their lives may not be at risk, but their basic rights and essential economic, social, and psychological needs remain unfulfilled after years in exile”.¹¹

The deterioration of Palestinian refugees’ living conditions coupled with the beginning of the Syrian civil war led thousands of them

to migrate to Europe¹². A census completed in January 2018 found that only 175,000 were still living in Lebanon,¹³ while another study placed the number between 260,000 and 280,000¹⁴ and the UNRWA estimates varies between 400,000 and 500,000.¹⁵

Since 2011, 32,000 more Palestinian refugees in Syria fled to Lebanon¹⁶. They have been subjected to a separate and strict policy. From mid-2013, their entry into Lebanon was conditioned to a pre-approved visa application made by a guarantor in Lebanon.¹⁷ In May 2014, entry was only possible if a Palestinian individual has an embassy appointment, is transiting to a third country or with a pledge of responsibility.¹⁸

Iraqi Refugees After the 1991 and 2003 Wars

Lebanon experienced two main waves of Iraqi refugees. 10,000 – mostly Christians and Shia – reached the country of cedars in the early 1990s, fleeing Saddam Hussein's regime as well as the hardships of international sanctions.¹⁹ As a direct result of the instability and violence that followed the 2003 invasion of Iraq, 20,000 more Iraqi refugees sought refuge in Lebanon. Their number reached between 40,000 and 45,000

after the February 2006 bombing of al-Askari Mosque in Samarra.²⁰

The majority of Iraqi refugees are not legally allowed to stay in Lebanon. A survey realised by the Danish Refugee Council in 2007 estimates that 71% of Iraqis surveyed had illegal status, and 95% of them reached Lebanon by being smuggled across the Syrian-Lebanese border.²¹ As a result, many Iraqi refugees live informally with little access to services or legal employment. The illegality of their stay in Lebanon makes it impossible to estimate how many of them currently live in Lebanon.

UNHCR granted refugee status on a *prima facie* basis to all Iraqi nationals from central and southern Iraq who have sought asylum in Lebanon from 2007. Nonetheless, Lebanon did not give legal effect to the UNHCR's recognition of Iraqi refugees until 2011. Before that date, some report pointed to hundreds of arrests and detentions of Iraqi refugees without valid visas or residency permits.²² Under article 32 of Lebanon's 1962 Law of Entry and Exit, foreigners who enter Lebanon illegally are liable to a prison sentence of between one month and three years, a fine, and deportation.

Lebanon's Refugee Population

Because of the sensitivity of religious balance and the fifteen-year civil war, no national census has been conducted since 1932, that is, before the founding of the modern Lebanese state. As for July 2017, the Lebanese population was believed to amount more than six million. The migrant population is mainly composed of Syrians, Palestinians, Iraqis, and Sudanese. Smaller numbers are from various African and Asian countries such as the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.²³

With more than 1,5 million Syrians and over 450,000 long-term Palestinian refugees, Lebanon has the highest per capita concentration of refugees in the world. Refugees represent almost one third of the Lebanese population. The number of refugees started decreasing in January 2018 only, when the number of registered Syrian refugees dropped to below one million for the first time since 2014.

Lebanon's Legal Framework on Refugees before the Syrian Conflict

The Absence of a Domestic Legal Framework for Refugees

Lebanon is not a party of the 1951 Geneva Convention nor its 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees. The Lebanese government has repeatedly stressed that Lebanon is neither a country of asylum, nor a country of resettlement. The status of refugees falls into the scope of the 1962 Law Regulating the Entry and Stay of Foreigners in Lebanon and their Exit from the Country.²⁴ Article 26 states that “Every foreigner who is persecuted or sentenced for a political crime outside Lebanon, or whose life or liberty is threatened on account of political activity, may apply for asylum in Lebanon”. Only the article 31 ensures the *non-refoulement* for a former political refugees. However, asylum has been granted on the basis of this disposition only once.²⁵

As for Syrians, the history of close ties between Syria and Lebanon led the countries to sign two bilateral agreements. The

Fraternity, Cooperation, and Coordination Treaty was concluded on May 22, 1991 and complemented by the Agreement for Economic and Social Cooperation and Coordination on September 16, 1993. In the context of the Syrian intervention in the Lebanese civil war, the agreements allowed reciprocal freedom of movement, residence, and property ownership. As a result, circular migration between the two countries was characteristic of their economy.²⁶ Syrian workers were estimated to number around 400,000 before the onset of the war in March 2011.²⁷ At the beginning of the Syrian conflict, those agreements enabled Syrian refugees to enter Lebanon via official border crossings.

In 2015, the Lebanese government declared that the Syrian refugee crisis was not governed by law but by governmental decisions. Hence, national laws and bilateral agreements presented above have been continuously sidestepped.²⁸

Lebanon's legal framework for the treatment of refugees lies on the 2003 Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed between the country and the UNHCR. In the case of the Syrian refugees, Lebanon and the European Union agreed on major bilateral deals in early 2016.

The 2003 Memorandum of Understanding Between Lebanon and the UNHCR

On the one hand, the Memorandum allows the UNHCR to register asylum seekers in Lebanon and to proceed their application for refugee status. The agreement also authorises registered refugees to obtain a temporary circulation permit up to twelve months. Individuals who hold this permit are exempt from arrest and detention for being in the country illegally.²⁹

On the other hand, the MoU (re)affirms that “Lebanon does not consider itself an asylum country” and specifies that an “asylum seeker” defines “a person seeking asylum in a country other than Lebanon”.³⁰ This definition reveals that Lebanon still refuses the 1951 Convention's definition of refugee. The term “refugee” is actually not used in the Lebanese context. Finally, the UNHCR is responsible of finding a solution to resettle the refugees outside of Lebanon.

Furthermore, the UNHCR is not permitted to freely register Syrian refugees without the previous consent from the Lebanese government. In April 2015, the Ministry of Social Affairs requested that UNHCR de-register over 1,400 Syrian refugees who had arrived in Lebanon after 5 January 2015.³¹

In May 2015, Lebanese authorities imposed a new ban on Syrian refugees registrations. This temporary suspension was supposed to enable the government to establish a new mechanism for registration of refugees. The UNHCR was compelled to stop monitoring Syrian refugees, including those already in the country and new arrivals.³²

Syrian Refugees in Lebanon

When the UNHCR started monitoring Syrian refugees in Lebanon in February 2013, they were 113,243. Registrations increased drastically in April 2013 to reach 1,191,332 in September 2014. Eventually, the number of Syrian refugees slowly decreased to stabilise between 991,000 and one million in 2017. In January 2018, it dropped to below one million for the first time since 2014. However, it is not clear how many have actually returned to Syria. Moreover, reports pointed to practices of deportation and forced return in Lebanon. Finally, all Syrian refugees are not registered with the UNHCR. Since the suspension of new registration of Syrian refugees, the UNHCR stopped recording individuals awaiting to be registered. Syrian refugees are believed to be about 1,5 million in

Lebanon, that is, more than one fourth of the total population, as of February 2017.

Syrians who fled the conflict in their home country come mainly from Damascus Homs and al-Qusayr, close to border with Lebanon, and from Jebel Saman, Idlieb, al-Ma'ra, and Hama in northern Syria. Most notably, many Syrians seeking shelter in Lebanon come from al-Raqqa district which is closer to Turkey or Jordan than Lebanon.

There are no formal Syrian refugee camps in Lebanon. Before the onset of the Syrian conflict, twelve Palestinian camps managed by the UNRWA existed. Evidence shows that few Syrians live in those camps, especially on a short-term period. However, no estimates of their number are known.³³ According to the UHCR, about 12% of refugee households live in informal settlements (tents from timber, plastic sheets, etc.), 17% lives in non-residential buildings (worksites, garages, shops), and the remaining 71% live in regular apartments, houses, or doorman rooms.

Syrian refugees are scattered across Lebanon, with Bekaa (36.1%), Beirut (26.3%), North Lebanon (25.6%) and South Lebanon District (12.0%) hosting the larger population. More than a third of Syrian

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refugees live in the poorest regions of Lebanon such as Bekaa, Akkar and Baalbeck-Hermel. This has created a major burden for the local communities which were in humanitarian needs before the crisis.

In spite of the efforts made by the Lebanese government and the help of UNHCR and other external aid to cope with the massive influx of refugees, 76% of Syrians households live below the poverty line of US\$3.84 per person. The figure reaches more than 80% in the districts bordering Syria. This represents an increase of almost 30% since 2014.³⁴ 55% of Syrian refugees are children under 18 years old, with 49% under 15 years old. Finally, 66% of households have at least one member with a specific need. The largest share of households is reported having one or more members with a chronic illness, while one third of households include a member with a temporary illness.³⁵

Lebanon's Syrian Refugees Policies

The Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon is highly politicised and the government's stance can be explained by the major antagonistic political parties' conflicting

loyalty to diverse actors of the conflict in Syria.

Lebanon's Policy of Dissociation and Openness to Syrian Refugees

At the early stages of the Syrian conflict, Lebanon was praised for its open borders and non-encampment policy. The bilateral agreements of 1991 and 1993 enabled Syrian refugees to enter Lebanon via official border crossings. At the condition that they could provide a valid Syrian identity document, Syrian refugees received an "entry coupon" and "entry stamp" that granted them legal residency for a period of six months. This initial authorisation could be renewed free of charge for another six months. Over one year, Syrians had to pay US\$200 per person in order to renew their residency.³⁶ Yet, several NGOs pointed to the unaffordable costs of those coupons, which are granted at the discretion of General Security and thus, not guaranteed.³⁷

The ambiguity of the government's response was exacerbated by the coming into power of Prime Minister Naguib Maqati who established a policy of neutrality under the label "disassociation policy". This policy was declared with the Baabda Declaration in mid-2012. It was thought as a way to

preserve the fragile balance between the various sectarian forces in Lebanon and to avoid the “spillover” of the conflict.³⁸ On the one hand, for the 8 March Alliance – a coalition comprising the influential Hezbollah, as well as the Shia Amal movement and some Christian, Druze and Sunni groups – Bashar al-Assad’s regime is an important political and military ally to be supported. On the other hand, the 14 March Alliance – a coalition of parties formed after the 2005 Cedar Revolution to end the Syrian occupation – are in favour of supporting the anti-Assad revolt. This alliance is led by the Sunni Future party and comprises Christian and Druze parties. In other words, the pro and anti-Assad movements in Syria mirror the sectarian divides in Lebanon.

While the neutrality of Lebanon allowed thousands of Syrians to seek refuge in the country, as time passed and number of refugees grew, there was fear that the presence of a large number of mostly Sunni Syrian refugees will alter the demographic balance and interests between the Sunni, Shia and Christian sects and political groups.

A few months after the resignation of Prime Minister Miqati in March 2013, the new government closed 18 unofficial border crossing-points.³⁹ The policy of

disassociation came to an end with the military involvement of Hezbollah on the side of al-Assad. The much feared spillover effect of the Syrian conflict destabilised Lebanon. The Sunni Nusra Front (later renamed *Jabhat Fateh al-Sham*) engaged in cross-borders fighting with the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF). This led a growing section of the Sunni Lebanese population to believe that the LAF was cooperating with Shia Hezbollah against Sunni populations, especially in the North of the country in Tripoli and Aarsal where al-Nusra was gaining control.⁴⁰ Simultaneously, elements of the Nusra Front and IS began infiltrating regions close to the Syrian border. In June 2014, Lebanese authorities imposed further restrictions on Syrian refugees when it declared that only those in fighting areas bordering Lebanon would be allowed to enter.⁴¹ In October 2014, the Lebanese government took two major steps towards the securitisation of Syrian refugees.

The Creation of a Legal Framework to Support Host Communities

As a first step, Lebanon decided to cooperate with the UN in the development of the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP). The three-year program was launched in 2014 by the Minister for Social

Affairs. It sets up three main strategic priorities: 1) ensuring humanitarian protection and assistance primarily to Syrian *de facto* refugees and the poorest Lebanese, 2) strengthening the capacity of national and local public delivery systems to accommodate the basic needs of the aforementioned people, and 3) supporting Lebanon's economic, social, institutional and environmental stability.⁴² The LCRP was renewed until 2020. The 2018 response plan appealed for US\$2.68 billion to provide humanitarian assistance, as well as invest in Lebanon's public infrastructures, services and local economy.⁴³

The LCRP is the Lebanese application of the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) in response to the Syria crisis, and is co-managed by the UN and the Lebanese Minister of Social Affairs. The 3RP was launched by the UN in December 2014, replacing the former inter-agency Regional Response Plan to the Syrian refugee crisis. The 3RP 2015-2016 attempted to design a comprehensive regional strategy to integrate humanitarian and development efforts to address the protection and assistance of refugee populations, and the resilience and stabilisation of host communities.

Yet, the regional engagements made by Lebanon clashed with its domestic "October Policy" of securitisation of Syrian refugees. Instead, the 3RP and LCRP were used as a channel to attract financial help and to fund the resilience of Lebanese populations.

The "October Policy" and the Securitisation of Syrian Refugees

Faced with the deterioration of national security, the Lebanese government approved a "Policy Paper on Syrian Refugee Displacement", known as the "October Policy". It acknowledges three main goals regarding the displaced Syrians: (1) reducing the number of Syrians by limiting their access to Lebanon and by encouraging them to return to Syria, (2) increasing security regulations of the Syrians, and (3) easing the burdens of both local and national authorities.⁴⁴ The General Security, the branch of state security responsible for dealing with foreigners, was given the mission to impose strict controls and interfere in the daily life of Syrians. Simultaneously, the LAF intensified their raids on Syrian refugee camps.⁴⁵ In the realm of politics, the Syrian refugees crisis was used by politicians in order to assert their nationalistic credentials.

The restrictive “October Policy” was implemented through a series of rules on entry, residency, renewal and regularisation, enacted on January 5 and 13, 2015, and on February 3 and 23, 2015.⁴⁶ This policy was criticised and thought to “deny entry to poorer Syrians, while keeping the borders open to those who enjoy good financial standing”.⁴⁷ Human rights defenders accused the policy to “manufacture vulnerability”⁴⁸ and pointed to many arrests, detentions and forced returns.⁴⁹ Moreover, no provision specifically deals with individuals fleeing armed conflict, violence or persecution and seeking safety in Lebanon. Instead, the regulations apply to less urgent cases such as business, tourist entries, or medical needs.

The Cooperation with International Donors

In February 2016 at the London Pledging Summit, Lebanon and the European Union concluded the “Lebanese Compact” deal to support vulnerable populations in Lebanon. This pact was annexed to the EU/Lebanon Priorities, a document that sets out mutually agreed priorities for cooperation until 2020, focusing on 1) fostering growth and job opportunities, 2) governance and rule of law, and 3) regional stability, security and countering terrorism.⁵⁰ As for Syrian refugees, Lebanon pledged to allow their

temporary stay. In exchange, European states committed around €400 million to support Lebanese policies.

However, expectations were not met and Lebanon imposed further restrictions on residency for Syrians, pushing those who could not afford the costly renewal of residency permits into increased precariousness and insecurity. Several commentators argued that those harsh policies were a way to force Syrian refugees to leave Lebanon without going against the principle of *non-refoulement*.⁵¹

Policy Variations at the Sub-National Level

At the sub-national level, the absence of a unified government and the resulting “non-policy” towards Syrian refugees allowed a certain degree of decentralisation in policy implementation.⁵² Identity politics and political economy are notably influential.

As for identity, confessionalism has been influential. Shia Hezbollah initially welcomed and assisted Syrian refugees for two main reasons. First, the Hezbollah remained thankful to the Syrians who opened their door to Lebanese fleeing the Israeli bombardments in 2006. Second, Hezbollah leader, Hassan Nasrallah, openly

insisted that the Syrian war must stay out of Lebanon.⁵³ Over time, the Shia party followed the securitisation stance of the Lebanese government and enforced a strict management of Syrian refugees. In 2016 and 2017, Hezbollah was involved in several cases of forced returns and *refoulements*.⁵⁴

As for areas controlled by Sunni majority, they have been most tolerant to the Syrian refugee presence. Although some municipalities have implemented strict rules over Syrians such as curfews, most of them encouraged socio-economic integration like in Tripoli and Sidon.⁵⁵

Finally, Christian areas seem to have mediated their response according to social class instead of religious identity.⁵⁶ Wealthy Syrians were often more likely to be integrated into a wealthy Christian area. The perception of economic opportunity to seek international aid to cope with the influx have encouraged several mayors to use curfews and deny services to camps as an indicator of social tensions and need for assistance.

The Socio Economic Impact of Syrian Refugees on Lebanon

Although the Syrian refugee crisis had undeniable effects on Lebanon's economy, the country has long suffered from the regional instability. Syria is Lebanon's main trade partner and transit grounds. After the conflict, Lebanon's exports had to rely on more expensive sea shipments and lost significant market shares, especially in the Gulf and in Iraq. Altogether, exports have decreased by one third since 2011.⁵⁷ Hence, the Syrian crisis not only led to a slowdown in consumer confidence, investment and tourism; but also to a direct negative impact on services and goods imports/exports.

Macro-economic Impact

The World Bank estimates that direct costs of the Syrian refugee crisis amount US\$400 million per year, while indirect costs are believe to exceed US\$2.5 billion in terms of the erosion of public services.⁵⁸ Public spending increased by US\$1 billion between 2011 and 2014, subtracting 2.9 percentage points annually to Lebanon's GDP growth.⁵⁹ Lebanese Social Affairs Minister Derbas put the direct cost of the refugee crisis at US\$7.5

billion between 2012 and 2014, that is 17% of GDP.⁶⁰

Economic growth averaged just 2% during the 2011–2016 period, having averaged 9.2% between 2007 and 2010. In 2011, when Syrian refugees arrived en masse, Lebanese GDP dropped to barely 1%. From 2012 to 2015, as a result of slower growth, Lebanon's average standard of living worsened, with real per capita GDP marking an 8.3% drop, representing a total loss of US\$726 million.⁶¹ While the UNHCR described the living conditions of Syrian refugees in Lebanon worst than ever,⁶² Lebanese population is also getting poorer.

Moreover, Lebanon continues to face large fiscal deficits. The country has the eighth largest debt burden in the world, with almost US\$70 billion, or 147% of GDP.⁶³ Instability resulting from the Syrian crisis and costs associated with the refugee population exacerbate the government's precarious fiscal situation.

Syrian refugees also have a positive impact on Lebanon's economy, especially on public revenues. Since the onset of the crisis until 2016, state revenues grew by almost US\$600 million.⁶⁴ The purchase of basic goods in the local markets by more than one

million refugees boosted revenues from consumption taxes. The same applies to the telecommunications sector. The number of subscribers to mobile telephony in Lebanon increased by about 400,000 between 2013 and 2016. Finally, residence permits for Syrian refugees have been a major source of taxation for the government. Lebanon imposes a fee of US\$200 per year after one year in the country and for all Syrians aged 15 and above. If only 20% of concerned people renew they permit each year,⁶⁵ Lebanon still increased its revenues from US\$35 million to 50 million from residence fees between 2011 and 2015.⁶⁶

Furthermore, Lebanon has received large amounts of foreign aid from the international community in order to cope with the influx of Syrian refugees and strengthen the Lebanese population's resilience to the crisis. According to official figures, the country receives roughly US\$1.5 billion each year.⁶⁷ At the February 2016 Supporting Syria and the Region conference in London, the international community pledged around US\$833 million in grants and US\$241 million in loans to Lebanon. During the last CEDRE conference in Paris in April 2018, Lebanon won pledges of grants and loans exceeding US\$11 billion.⁶⁸

The positive impact of Syrian refugees is stronger at the local level. In 2016, Syrian refugees consumed locally an average of US\$106 per capita, which represents roughly US\$1.5 billion per year. These estimates are based on the official number of registered refugees. The real figures are thus probably much higher. This boost of private consumption, although modest, contributed to the economic growth of Lebanon. Finally, many Syrian refugees who settled in Lebanon from the onset of the Syrian crisis are part of the bourgeoisie from Damascus and Aleppo. Although most of the wealthy Syrians settled in Europe, the US or the Gulf countries, a minority came to Lebanon and invested in the country's real estates, private education and companies.⁶⁹

Impact by Economic Sector

Structural transformations initiated before the Syrian conflict were paused by the massive inflows of Syrian refugees. Increased competition over access to public services and infrastructures has caused social tensions, especially between the 1,5 million Syrian refugees and as many Lebanese vulnerable individuals.

The Syrian refugee crisis has underscored the weak electricity system in Lebanon and

forced authorities to address the energy sector issue. The entire service is subsidised by the government and thus reliant on public resources. Syrian refugee influxes created an additional burden on the electricity system. According to the LRP 2017-2020, 45% of Syrian refugees meet their demand in electricity through illegal connections to the national grid.⁷⁰ This led to significant technical damages, increased maintenance costs, and reduced supply quality and quantity for host communities. A study undertaken by the Ministry of Energy and Water (MoEW) and UNDP revealed that an additional 486 megawatts of power supply are needed to cover the demand of the 1,5 million displaced Syrians in Lebanon.⁷¹

586,540 Syrian refugees in Lebanon are between the age of 3 and 18, which represents half of the total Syrian refugee population in the country. 9,797 other Palestinian refugees from Syria are under 18. Finally, 451,323 Lebanese children are in need of education assistance. For the 2016-2017 school year, a total of 250,000 non-Lebanese children and 5,251 Palestinian children from Syria were enrolled in formal or non-formal education programs.⁷² The education costs are mainly supported by the government, putting more pressure on public

finances. The average annual costs of public basic education are over US\$1,000 after donor's contribution.⁷³ In spite of those efforts, more than half of school-aged Syrian children are out of school. Public schools suffer the most from the impact of pressure on education system. Although 67 have been opened since 2011, they are saturated. Teachers must cover double shifts without receiving fair financial compensation, which means that children spend less time in the classroom. Finally, the recruitment of additional teaching staff is a burden on public finances. All those constraints impede the quality of education and teaching in the country for both Syrians and Lebanese.

The impact of the Syrian refugee crisis on the health sector is considerable. All Syrian refugees, whether they are registered with the UNHCR or not, have free access to primary healthcare facilities. Between January and September 2017 only, 878,481 consultations were provided to Syrian refugees in Lebanese infrastructures. During the same period, 61,257 Syrians were admitted for hospital care, at an average of 6,806 admissions per month.⁷⁴ According to official figures, public hospitals have accumulated a deficit of US\$15 million between 2011 and 2016. This is mainly due

to the inability of Syrian refugees to cover for hospitalisation fees after surgery. Moreover, Lebanon has witnessed a 27% increase in tuberculosis rates since 2011.⁷⁵ Finally, the country is lacking staff, equipment,⁷⁶ and medication⁷⁷. Consequently, Lebanese have decreased access to primary health care because of perceived reduced quality of care, overcrowding, and increased waiting time.

In 2016, 91% of Syrian refugees were still considered food insecure, especially in southern districts and in areas bordering Syria. Syrian refugees spend more than 50% of their monthly expenditures to buy food, which shows their extreme vulnerability.⁷⁸

The refugee crisis also had great impact on Lebanese livelihood. The agricultural sector, which represents a large part of food production capacity in Lebanon, has been greatly impacted. 15% of the refugee population is scattered across 4,881 informal settlements, with the majority located on and near agricultural lands.⁷⁹ Furthermore, prices of basic goods have soared due to the increase in population and demand, the injection of cash and food/cash vouchers for Syrian refugees, and the reduced access to cheaper goods from Syria.

Inflation also affected housing and the vulnerable Lebanese populations who are unable to cope with this rise. A 44% increase in rents was reported between June 2012 and June 2013 only.⁸⁰ In Beirut, the situation is dramatic. In some districts of the capital, rents are believed to have increased by up to 400%⁸¹. The 445,000 Lebanese who live under the poverty line have no access to adequate housing.⁸² The inflation is directly linked to the influx of Syrian refugees, which creates pressure on the demand for apartment. 73% of the Syrian population is leaving outside informal settlements. This forced several Syrian families to live in common crowded apartments in order to lower renting costs. In 2017, 33% of Syrians refugees lived in shelters with less than 4.5m² per person.⁸³ Not to mention the rent paid to tent owners in informal camps, varying between US\$100 and US\$160 per household.⁸⁴

While Lebanon enjoys a favourable water endowment, the Syrian refugee crisis highlighted the poor resilience of the water management in Lebanon. Before the crisis, only 8% of all water consumed was treated before being sent to the environment.⁸⁵ Since 2011, the demand on water increased by an estimated 8 to 12%, straining the

country's resources. The impact has been especially strong for the agricultural sector which accounts for 61% of total water demand. This increased demand and following shortage has led refugee and local community to over rely on alternative sources such as water delivery by truck, unsafe wells or illegal network tapping. This resulted in the creation of an unregulated parallel water supply market where rates are 200 to 300% higher than public water fees.⁸⁶

Finally, the environment has been greatly impacted by the influx of Syrian refugees, arming host communities and straining public finances. Between 2012 and 2014, municipal spending on waste disposal, particularly in Akkar and Bekaa, has increased by 40%,⁸⁷ while 92% of sewage was running untreated into water sources. As a result, in 2017, wastewater pollution had increased by 33%. As for air pollution, it is also increasing due to the overreliance of refugees and host communities on diesel generators for electricity generation.⁸⁸ Finally, the non-encampment policy of the Lebanese government led many Syrian families to settle on and close to forest and agricultural lands. This has resulted in massive land degradation and firewood depletion.

Impact on the Labour Market

The most tangible impact of Syrian refugees is seen on the existing job opportunities, wage level and working conditions. Some voices consider that the presence of Syrian refugees in Lebanon is the main cause of rising unemployment. The co-relation is undeniable. Since the onset of the Syrian crisis, the labour force has increased by 50% in the country. In 2017, the World Bank estimated that the Lebanese economy should need to create six times as many jobs just to absorb the regular market entrants.⁸⁹ While official figures announce 10% of unemployment in Lebanon, in March 2018, President Michel Aoun directly pointed to Syrian refugees as the main cause of unemployment rate's rise to 46%.⁹⁰ Simultaneously, International Labour Organisation (ILO) estimates that half of the working-age Syrian refugees are active.⁹¹ The competition is particularly high in the informal sector that contributes to more than 56% of total employment.

Not only skilled jobs have become highly competitive, but it has become more difficult to even acquire low-paid jobs. The fact that Syrian refugees are accepting lower incomes and longer work hours without any social benefit presents direct challenge to job

opportunities for Lebanese. Syrian refugees have an average monthly income of US\$277, 40% lower than the minimum monthly average for Lebanon of US\$448.⁹² As a result, labour market standards have sunk.⁹³ Recent estimates suggest that unskilled wages in some areas have fallen by as much as 50%.

However, some advocate that the massive influx of Syrian refugees on the Lebanese labour market is less conducive to real competition.⁹⁴ On the one hand, the majority of Syrian refugees are under 24 and did not have access to education. They thus turn to the illicit sector or third sector. On the other hand, Lebanese have a high enrolment rate in secondary education and university. They turn to the private sector. As a consequence, the structural gap between Syrian refugees and Lebanese is not problematic. While this suggests that Syrians do not compete directly with Lebanese in the access to the labour market and job opportunities, it is likely that Syrians directly compete with other immigrants. Indeed, the majority of Syrians workers are active in agriculture, construction and personal and domestic services, which have traditionally been dominated by migrant workers.

In February 2015, faced with the mounting social unrest, Lebanon suspended the right to work for Syrian refugees. Lebanese authorities issued new regulation about Syrians' entry and residency in Lebanon. According to those new rules, Syrians renewing their residency permits on the basis of an UNHCR registration certificate shall sign a pledge not to work.⁹⁵ As for Syrians with work permit, their employment was restricted to the third sector, mainly in construction, agriculture and cleaning services.⁹⁶ Those Syrian refugees must pay a US\$80 fee for their work permit. The fee rose to more than US\$300 for other sectors, and the employer must prove his/her inability to find an adequately skilled Lebanese worker for the same job. Those restrictions result in the inability of Syrian refugees to meet their basic needs and put them in more precarious living conditions.

Political Impact

The political legitimacy of the Lebanese regime is based on the fragile balance between three different sectarian groups. The demographics has been dramatically altered by the influx of Syrian refugees, many of them belonging to the Sunni sect.

Moreover, the security situation has deteriorated since the arrival of Syrian refugee populations in Lebanon. As early as 2013, a national poll addressing Lebanese perceptions toward the Syrian crisis revealed that 52% of the interviewees believed that Syrians refugees are threatening national stability and security. 98% presumed Syrian refugees are taking jobs from the local population, and another 50% thought that the refugees are benefiting from financial aid in an unfair manner.⁹⁷

In 2014, radical armed groups associated with the Islamic State and al-Nusra Front arrived to Lebanon and were thought to recruit directly in vulnerable refugee populations. A series of security accidents led to the engagement of the Lebanese Armed Forces with these groups in 2014.

To conclude, Lebanon's confessional systems, population pressure, the strain on municipalities, and the degrading livelihoods of vulnerable groups contribute to a situation that could lead to deepened social divisions and strongest social unrest.

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